

Welcome to Worship at  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Osceola, WI  
Advent 2 - December 6, 2020

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

**Hymn #11 - "Comfort, Comfort All My People"**

**"Comfort, comfort all my people;  
Speak of peace," so says our God.  
"Comfort those who sit in darkness,  
Groaning from their sorrows' load.  
Speak to all Jerusalem  
Of the peace that waits for them;  
Tell them that their sins I cover,  
That their warfare now is over."**

**All their sins our God will pardon,  
Blotting out each dark misdeed;  
All that well deserve his anger  
He no more will see or heed.  
They have suffered many a day;  
Now their griefs have passed away.  
God will change their aching sadness  
Into ever-springing gladness.**

**John the Baptist's voice is crying  
In the desert far and near,  
Calling people to repentance  
For the kingdom now is here.  
Oh, that warning cry obey!  
Now prepare for God a way;  
Let the valleys rise to meet him  
And the hills bow down to greet him.**

**Straighten out the crooked highway;  
Make the rougher places plain.**

**Let your hearts be true and humble,  
Ready for his holy reign.  
For the glory of the Lord  
Now o'er earth is spread abroad,  
And all flesh shall see the token  
That his word is never broken.**

**Confession of Sins:**

**P:** Beloved in the Lord, let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins to God our Father, asking Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.

**C:** **Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess to You that we are by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against You in our thoughts, words, and actions. Therefore we flee for refuge to Your infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Your grace and forgiveness for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. O Lord, have mercy on us!**

**P:** Upon this your confession, I as a called servant of Christ and His Word announce to you the grace of God, and in the place of and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**C:** **Amen.**

**First Lesson: Isaiah 40:1-11**

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call out to her. Her warfare really is over. Her guilt is fully paid for. Yes, she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice is calling out: In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord. In the wasteland make a level highway for our God. Every valley will be raised up, and every mountain and hill will be made low. The rugged ground will become level, and the rough places will become a plain. Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh together will see it. Yes, the mouth of the Lord has spoken. A voice was saying, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry out?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like a wildflower in the countryside. Grass withers, flowers fade, when the breath of the Lord blows on them. Yes, the people are grass. Grass withers, flowers fade, but the Word of our God endures forever. Get up on a high mountain, O Zion, you herald of good news. Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, you herald of good news. Lift it up! Do not be afraid! Say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" Look, God the Lord will come with strength, and his arm is ruling for him. Look,

his reward is with him. The result of his work is in front of him. Like a shepherd he will care for his flock. With his arm he will gather the lambs. He will lift them up on his lap. He will gently lead the nursing mothers. (EHV)

**Psalm 85:**

**Refrain: I will hear what the Lord proclaims: peace to his people.**

**You showed favor to your 'land, O LORD;  
You restored the fortunes of 'Jacob.**

**You forgave the iniquity of your 'people  
And covered 'all their sins.**

**Show us your unfailing 'love, O LORD,  
And grant us your sal'vation.**

**Refrain: I will hear what the Lord proclaims: peace to his people.**

**I will listen to what God the 'LORD will say;  
He promises peace to his people, 'his saints.**

**Surely his salvation is near those who 'fear him,  
That his glory may dwell 'in our land.**

**Love and faithfulness meet to'gether;  
Righteousness and peace kiss each 'other.**

**Glory be to the Father and 'to the Son  
And to the Holy 'Spirit,  
As it was in the be'ginning,  
Is now, and will be forever. 'Amen.**

**Refrain: I will hear what the Lord proclaims: peace to his people.**

**Second Lesson: 2 Peter 3:8-14**

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: For the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow to do what he promised, as some consider slowness. Instead, he is patient for your sakes, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will pass away with a roar, the

elements will be dissolved as they burn with great heat, and the earth and what was done on it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be destroyed, what kind of people ought you to be, living in holiness and godliness, as you look forward to and hasten the coming of the day of God? That day will cause the heavens to be set on fire and destroyed, and the elements to melt as they burn with great heat. But according to his promise we look forward to new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, dear friends, as you look forward to these things, make every effort to be found in peace, spotless and blameless in his sight. (EHV)

**Verse of the Day:** Alleluia. Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. All mankind will see God's salvation. Alleluia.

**Gospel: Mark 1:1-8**

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is how it is written in the prophet Isaiah: Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare the way for you. A voice of one calling out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight." John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him. They were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins. John was clothed in camel's hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. He preached, "One more powerful than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals! I baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (EHV)

**The Apostles' Creed:**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

**Hymn #13 - "There's a Voice in the Wilderness Crying"**

**There's a voice in the wilderness crying,  
A call from the ways untrod:  
Prepare in the desert a highway,  
A highway for our God!  
The valleys shall be exalted,  
The lofty hills brought low;  
Make straight all the crooked places  
Where the Lord our God may go!**

**O Christians, you bring good tidings;  
Get up to the heights and sing!  
Proclaim to a desolate people  
The coming of their King.  
Like the flow'rs of the field they perish;  
Like grass their works decay.  
The pow'r and pomp of nations  
Shall pass like a dream away;**

**But the Word of our God is eternal;  
The arm of the Lord is strong.  
He stands in the midst of the nations,  
And he shall right the wrong.  
He shall feed his flock like a shepherd,  
The lambs shall gently hold,  
To pastures of peace shall lead them,  
And bring them safe to his fold.**

**The Sermon:      Mark 1:1-8  
                          "John The Baptist - God's Messenger"**

Mark 1:1-8

The human **ear** is the finest audio component in the **world**, but by **itself**, it is **useless**. One of the greatest blessings the Lord gives to us is the ability to make good **use** of our ears - to **listen**. Hundreds of people throughout history have heard **voices** which seemed to have no **origin**. **Listening** to such voices usually meant **trouble**, as it did for Joan of Arc, for Mohammed, and for hundreds of others as

well. Yet, as Mark begins his account of the life of **Jesus**, he **also** speaks about a voice. However, **this** voice **has** an origin. It's the voice of one calling in the **desert** - it's the voice of **John The Baptist - God's Messenger**. In our text today, the Lord exhorts us to **listen** to his voice, because as God's messenger, John is both a **herald** and a **pioneer** - and his message brings **salvation**.

Throughout his entire book, Mark pictures Jesus as an active, energetic, conquering **King**. Mark speaks of Jesus as being the **Christ** - the **Anointed One** who was set aside by **God**, and fully **equipped** to be our Prophet, Priest, and King - fully **qualified** to save all people. This individual, Jesus Christ, is the center of attention in Mark's Gospel. So, it's only fitting and proper that such an important individual would be preceded by a **prophet**. John the Baptist was a **prophet** in every sense of the word. First of all, he was a **herald** - a man who proclaimed the words and the wisdom of **God**. The purpose of a herald is to **prepare the way** for the King's coming, and also to announce His **arrival**. John did **both** of these things in a rather unusual style. He had been foretold long ago by the Prophet Isaiah, "*I am sending **my messenger** ahead of you, who will **prepare the way** for you. A voice of one calling out in the wilderness, '**Prepare the way** of the Lord. Make his paths straight.*'" Actually, the first part of that quote doesn't come from **Isaiah** at all, it comes from **Malachi**. Nevertheless, **both** prophets foretell a **messenger** - another **prophet** - who would **prepare the way** for the coming Messiah.

At the time of our text, it had been some 400 years since a **legitimate** prophet had appeared on the scene, and the people were **not** going to miss out on his message! The 20 mile trip out into the wilderness region was a **difficult** one - downhill **from** Jerusalem, but **uphill** all the way **back**. Yet, John brought his message of salvation to **thousands**, as they flocked out from Jerusalem and the surrounding territory to gather at the Jordan River - to hear the **preaching** of John, and to receive his **baptism**. How strange it was, and yet how **significant**, that the people would leave the safety and luxury of their homes to go out into the wilderness, and **listen** to man who lived a very **simple** existence.

How simple **was** it? Well, we could start with his **clothes**. They were **certainly** simple - woven of **camel's hair**, resulting in a very **rough** and **coarse** material - and he wore a **leather belt** around his waist. Actually, these clothes probably served a very **good** purpose, because the people would have recognized them as the **traditional garb** of a prophet. In fact **Elijah**, the prophet whom John the Baptist most closely resembles, was described **this** way, "*He was dressed in clothing made of **hair**, with a **leather belt** tied around his waist.*" Such clothes couldn't have been very **comfortable**, but they were apparently quite **suitable** for

the desert. They also would have been very **durable**.

John's **food** was simple too. We're told that he ate **locusts** and wild **honey**. That certainly doesn't sound like a **typical** diet. In fact, **we** might even be **appalled** at the idea of eating big grasshoppers. But **our** opinions on the subject really don't **matter**, because it's quite clear that the **Lord** approved. And who knows, perhaps they were actually quite **tasty**. As I did some of the research for this sermon, I found a few "recipes" for the preparation of locusts. It seems that usually, they were prepared by removing the wings and legs, then roasting or baking them, and finally adding a touch of salt. Maybe **you'd** like to try roasted grasshoppers sometime, but I think **I'll** pass. However, the wild **honey** sounds a lot **better**. Actually, this wild honey was not just a **sweetener**. Rather, it was a very complete and nourishing **food** all by itself. Of course, John may have eaten **other** things too, which are not **mentioned**, but what **is** mentioned serves as a living **testimony** - showing us how little we actually **need** in order to **survive** when it comes to **physical** things. John considered God's **Word** to be much more **important**, and by his own appearance and lifestyle, he attempted to turn the thoughts of the people **away** from **selfishness** and self-**indulgence**, toward **higher** things.

However, in order to actually make that **happen**, there would have to be some **preparation** on the part of the people themselves. But what **sort** of preparations would they need to make? God sent John the Baptist to **help** them, and he **did** so - from the **inside out**. John's message was, "*Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths **straight**.*" **Every** roadway needs **preparation**. The hills and valleys need to be evened out, the trees and houses need to be cleared, and a firm **base** needs to be laid. If the **obstacles** are not removed, the road will be both **crooked** and **dangerous**. By preaching a message of **repentance**, John was telling the people to prepare their **hearts**. His purpose was to make a clear, straight path in those hearts for the **Lord** - a path which had no **obstacles** to go around. The obstacles we encounter in people's **lives** are made up of **sin**. Sin **blocks** the way for the Lord as He seeks to **enter** human hearts. So John preached, "*Repent*" - be **sorry** for your sins, believe that God has **forgiven** them, and strive to do **better** in the future! That message made the people **aware** of their sins, and the fact that holding on to those **sins** was actually keeping them **away** from **God**. John the Baptist had fulfilled his duties as a **herald**, by clearing the path for our Savior to come.

That message of repentance is still important **today**. What was true before Christ's **first** coming, is also true **now**, before His **second** coming. The Lord is looking for **repentance** in our lives, and when we **do** repent, we will be preparing

a path for the Lord in **our** hearts **before** He returns in all His glory on Judgment Day.

But John's message included much **more** than repentance. He was also a **pioneer** - a man who forged ahead into areas which had been virtually untouched by those who had come before. Mark writes, "*John appeared, **baptizing** in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*" This idea of **baptism** was previously unheard of! It was a **completely new** concept. And although John was actually doing his baptizing even **before** the time when Jesus Himself **commanded** baptism, it was essentially no different from the baptism which **we** receive. It was a **Means of Grace** which brought **forgiveness** of sins, and **peace** with God.

The word **forgiveness** literally means "sending away." In the Bible, God describes that sending away in a variety of **word pictures** including: **removing** our sins as far as the east is from the west - or **blotting out** our transgressions, and **remembering** our sins **no more** - or casting our **mountains** of sin into the depths of the **sea**, where they'll be **drowned** forever. In the Old Testament, God even gives us a **visual** picture of the sending away of our sins. On the great Day of Atonement, a **goat** was brought before the High Priest. The priest would then place all the sins and wickedness of the **people** on the head of that **goat**. Then the goat was to be led **out** of the city, where it would carry the sins of the people out into the **wilderness**. Thus the sins of God's people would be **far removed** from them. This **goat** was known as the **scapegoat**, and of course the term is still used **today** when someone or something **gets the blame** for someone or something **else**! This **scapegoat** was a glimpse into the **future** of **Christ** - who took upon **His** head the sins of **all** people, and carried them all **away** - leaving **us** with free **forgiveness** and everlasting **life**. There can be no **sweeter** message for the Christian, than knowing that our **sins** have been **forgiven**.

That was the **message** of John the Baptist - a message of **repentance** and **forgiveness**. Jesus Himself held John the Baptist in the **highest** regard. He said, "*Amen I tell you: Among those born of women there has not appeared anyone **greater** than John the Baptist.*" Yet, John didn't even consider himself worthy of being the very **least** of the **servants** of Christ. And that wasn't **false modesty** on John's part either. John wasn't trying to downplay his **own** talents and abilities. Rather, he was emphasizing how **great Jesus** is. Jesus is **eternal** - John was **mortal**. Jesus is **infinite** - John was **finite**. Jesus is **original** light - John was **reflected** light. There can be no doubt about the superiority of **Jesus**, and John made sure the people **knew** it.



John the Baptist was a **special** person in God's plan of salvation - a special **prophet** with a special **purpose** at a special **time**. Those who **listened** to this voice crying out in the wilderness saying, "*Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near,*" ended up with an **unobstructed path** straight into their hearts for their Lord and Savior. That same message prepares the way for Jesus in **our** lives too, so He can bring **us** eternal salvation. So, **listen** to the voice of John the Baptist - **repent** of your sins, trust in **Jesus alone** for forgiveness, and strive in **thankfulness** to live a more godly life. You'll be **glad** you did. Amen.

### **Prayers:**

Dear Father, we thank You for preparing the kingdom of **heaven** for us through **Jesus Christ** Your dear Son, and for making us **members** of the same through **faith** in Him. What **joy**, what **hope**, what **peace** is ours through Jesus. We know that for **His** sake You now **rule** us with Your grace, **forgiving** all our sins, and that You will **give** us everlasting life in heaven. No longer are we held in the bondage of **fear** and the power of **sin**, but trusting in Your **Son**, we are able to live **victoriously** over sin to the glory of Your name.

O Holy Spirit, **continue** Your work in us that we may never lose our hold on everlasting life. Led by **You** instead of our sinful **flesh**, may we always seek **first** the kingdom of heaven - putting Your **Word**, and the **promise** of everlasting life it brings - ahead of **everything** else. Grant us Your **grace** so that we will never **fall** from faith, **fail** to worship You, or **tire** of serving You with loving obedience. Strengthen our ability to **resist** sin. Lead us continually into Your **Word**, giving us a desire to hear it **preached**, as well as a love for **reading** and **studying** it in our homes. Impress the truths of Your Word upon our minds and hearts. Also, give us a hunger and thirst for the **Lord's Supper**, and cause us to receive it **frequently** for the forgiveness of our sins. Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer (sung to "Away in a Manger")**

**Our Father in heaven all praise to Your name!  
Your kingdom among us, Your will done the same  
By mortals and angels. Come, Lord reign alone;  
Oh, hear us and bless us from heaven's high throne.**

**The bread that we yearn for provide us each day;  
As we forgive others, our sins take away;  
In times of temptation, to lead us; be near.**

**From evil deliver Your children most dear.**

**For Yours is the kingdom, o'er all things You reign.  
And Yours is the power; all things You maintain.  
To You be the glory, resounding again  
From all of creation, forever! Amen.**

**Hymn #20 - *"When All the World Was Cursed"***

**When all the world was cursed by Moses' condemnation,  
Saint John the Baptist came with words of consolation.  
With true forerunner's zeal the greater one he named,  
And him, as yet unknown, as Savior he proclaimed.**

**Before Saint John was born, he leaped in joyful meeting,  
Confessing him as Lord whose mother he was greeting.  
By Jordan's rolling stream, a new Elijah bold,  
He testified of him whom prophets had foretold.**

**Behold the Lamb of God, who bears the world's transgression,  
Whose sacrifice removes the devil's dread oppression.  
Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin,  
Who for our peace and joy will full atonement win.**

**Oh, grant, dear Lord of love, that we receive, rejoicing,  
The word proclaimed by John, our true repentance voicing,  
That gladly we may walk upon our Savior's way  
Until we live with him in his eternal day.**

P: Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit! As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

**The Blessing:**

P: The Lord bless you and keep you,  
The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.  
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.

**C: Amen.**

**Hymn #16 - *“On Jordan’s Bank the Baptist’s Cry”***

**On Jordan’s bank the Baptist’s cry  
Announces that the Lord is nigh;  
Come, then, and listen, for he brings  
Good news about the King of kings.**

**Then cleansed be ev’ry life from sin  
And furnished for a guest within,  
And let us all our hearts prepare  
For Christ to come and enter there.**

**We hail you as our Savior, Lord,  
Our refuge and our great reward.  
Without your grace we waste away  
Like flow’rs that wither and decay.**

**Stretch forth your hand, our health restore,  
And lift us up to fall no more.  
Oh, make your face on us to shine,  
And fill the world with love divine.**

**All praise to you, eternal Son,  
Whose advent has our freedom won,  
Whom with the Father we adore  
And Holy Spirit evermore.**